Purple Monkey, Yellow Rabbit

Purple Monkey, Yellow Rabbit

Theatre-based activities for connection, compassion and courage

by

Gopal Midha Ph.D.

Cover designed by Gopal Midha

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Dedication

To nature, where I always find the courage to keep going
To all my friends who held my hand when I needed it most
To family, especially dad who taught me so much about compassion

Acknowledgements

This book, to come alive, needed:
My teachers Natalie Sowell, Ben Rivers and David Diamond who from whom I learnt the intricacies of theatre.
My dear friend Boomie Pederson and the Hamner theatre troupe who taught me so much about improv and playback.
All my students and co-participants from over a decade of playing theatre activities and games in schools, colleges, government institutions, non-government organizations and informal workplaces.
Jennifer Thomas and Meenu Thomas who read through my drafts and gave editorial suggestions.

Preface

Purple monkey, Yellow Rabbit is an activity I have enjoyed playing when learning theatre. Whenever I have facilitated this activity, people tell me that they forget about their worries, become fully present with their bodies and get focused even in the midst of a hectic, fragmented day. The 'me' in them feels alive.

What I love most though is that Purple Monkey, Yellow Rabbit depends totally on how we play together; creating a group out of strangers as it connects 'me' to the 'we'. That's why it fits as this book's title.

Plus, it's memorable.

Don't buy this book!!!

No, this ain't some reverse psychology. I really want you to invest in this book. But more than that, I want you to invest in this book knowing what I offer and what to expect. Many people expect theatre to be 'entertainment' and some might even expect a formulaic and smooth approach to building values. I am not sure I can honour such expectations through this book.

So, for what it's worth, here are four points to consider before investing.

- Reflection, not entertainment: The activities in this book are designed to make people reflect deeply on what they are saying, doing and how their actions could be better. The activities probe for deeply held views and challenges such views to cultivate new values. Although the activities I share are engaging and frequently fun, I would not consider them as entertaining.

- Self-care necessary: The activities here do not require any theatre experience, but what they do require is practicing self-care. Cultivating courage, for instance, may trigger past memories-bring up tears and vulnerability. Hence, as a facilitator, self-care is paramount. This means being comfortable with expressions of vulnerability and knowing when to pause or stop an activity. If you are still new to facilitation or teaching or self-care practices, I would recommend finding a less intense theatre activity book.

I have given tips for self-care in this book- but I offer them more as a reminder to someone who practices them.

- Requires adaptation; not a formulaic approach. I consider theatre activities as living tools. I have suggested that people begin with the given activity, as it is described, and continually design adaptations to make it work for their context. This will take time and experimentation. If the reader has little time to adapt and would prefer a prescriptive formula, I am sure she will find theatre books.

- Expect resistance. This book is largely about change- and all of us (me, for sure) resist change. I have had people not talk to me after the workshop because they were angry. Angry, not because I said something, but because- as I was told later- the activities revealed a conflict between words and action. This is normal, natural and necessary to deep change. My own reaction to finding how my actions are not aligned with my words is usually defensiveness and anger. The good thing is that most participants come around and would really appreciate this kind of interaction. However, if the idea behind purchasing the book, is to become popular quickly and have everyone leave a workshop feeling good- maybe another theatre book might be wiser.

I hope these four points have been helpful. My intent is not to intimidate you, but only to say that the journey to change is often bumpy. I do promise you though, that the sunrise you get at the end would be worth it.

Foreword

Theatre is joyous and delightful- and this book, that maybe some would call a manual, proves it. I have participated in two workshops facilitated by Gopal and as I read the manual and relived the activities, I remembered how fun and insightful they were. In the first workshop, I was a participant with senior teachers like me armed with their PhDs. In the second workshop, I was with student teachers, a group of 21-26 year-olds. After each workshop, all I kept thinking was, "We must do more of this".

Now, after reading the anecdotes and the description, rationale, process, debrief and reflections for each activity, I understand what made them so engaging and provocative. I begin to understand why my favourite activity, Complete the Image, makes me feel alive, think of my professional identity and leads to new solutions. So, this book is not just a how-to, it is about whys and ifs and that knowledge is empowering.

Overall, I find Gopal's book concise, simply-written, well structured, and full of practical and doable activities for anyone who wants to use theatre in their workshop or teaching. I really appreciate the conciseness- we really have limited time and to go through 200 pages to cull out a few activities may not work for busy professionals. Teachers, in general, tend to be tad verbal and these activities most definitely will help them to become more kinesthetic and multi-sensory. Even corporate trainers will find gems to build teamwork and transform organizational culture. And of course, you need zero theatre experience to get started.

A resounding Yes that these activities will evoke connection, communication and compassion. I have been part of his workshops and they did for me. In all, a big welcome to the joyous world of theatre activities with the Purple Monkey, Yellow rabbit.

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Chapter I

Introduction

30 people walk around in a big room feeling the cool marble below their feet. I ask them to begin walking as if it is raining heavily and there are puddles everywhere. Some of the people scrunch their shoulders, some begin to jump over imaginary puddles and some of them even open an imaginary umbrella. Maya stops, looks up, closes her eyes and smiles. Danny notices and then stands next to her. Soon everyone has stopped and they are all getting soaked in imaginary rain. They remain standing.

During the debrief they tell me that when they all stopped and stood quietly, they felt something that was difficult to describe. They felt as if they were one. This was unusual because they were senior teachers and principals from three neighbouring schools. They had known each other for decades as colleagues, but this was the first time they had connected!

The story above challenges the image of theatre as something that only actors can do. It also demonstrates the power of universal experiences in connecting strangers in a very real, a very deeply-felt way. Even though we might have heard that we are all connected- experiencing that connection can be a moment of truth that people don't forget. I experienced many such moments of truth when I began learning theatre in 2009.

In 2010, I published my master's capstone- a manual on using theatre of the oppressed (TO) activities to fight bullying and racism in schools. This manual crossed 30,000 downloads by Jan 2022. Such a high number of downloads for a master's thesis is rare and it indicated that even though TO is well known, there are very few structured tool-kits written for educators. I received emails from people who downloaded the manual who thanked me for creating a resource that was written keeping them in mind. I continue to be grateful for such an overwhelming response. Since publishing that manual, I have used theatre activities to conduct workshops with teachers, teacher educators, and principals across schools and colleges. I received training in other wonderful forms of theatre such as playback theatre (PBT), improvisational theatre (improv), and theatre for living (TfL). I also got my PhD in educational administration and leadership which provided me with insights about motivation, teaching-learning, leadership, and social justice.

This book builds on all the above experiences, modifying activities and creating new ones with a nuanced knowledge of educational theory. Using theories of learning and motivation, I adapted these activities so that they enrich learning for all age groups while sustaining high motivation.

This book is not a substitute for understanding TO, PBT, TfL or improv. I would encourage you to invest in the books mentioned in the additional resources chapter if you are sincere about diving more deeply into using those forms of theatre in your work.

Why theatre?

There are certain advantages to theatre. First, it can be easily moulded to each person's needs and it provides an embodied sense of connection, compassion and courage. Second, it transcends verbal and written language barriers which have their own set of elitist discrimination. You do not have to be literate (or speaking the same language) to be in a theatre activity. It can bridge two communities or departments, who might

not speak the same language. Third, it allows anyone to simultaneously translate and transform their experience in ways that are refreshingly engaging.

My philosophical approach to theatre is a combination of three beliefs:

1. Theatre is about the body and the body is a necessary medium to understand and fight inequality and inequity through connection, compassion and courage. We can read and talk about inequity and inequality , but when it comes to getting a real feel- the PRIMACY of the body- the gestures, the facial expressions, the bodily movements- is unchallenged. When you engage in a physical activity with others that raises goosebumps- the experience is transformational. A long hug, a quick meeting of eyes, a gentle caress are almost impossible to capture in words. Even though we might be interacting virtually, we can still use the body to generate and remember experiences.

2. Theatre is about making visible the invisible STORIES that run our lives. The visual images of bullying or caste discrimination, collaboration or innovation show a much richer story than writing about them in case studies. The visual images bring invisible stories to life so that we can see what is the real reason behind why we act the way we do. Oral narratives and soundscapes have their own gateways to shape our psyche.

3. Theatre is about 'feeling' the change. Often most efforts at change begin and end in talk. That is where the energy goes. But in theatre, especially forms such as forum theatre or playback, the participants enact the new reality and 'feel' the change.

I also want to clear three misconceptions about the way the word theatre is used and interpreted that holds people back from using theatre activities.

- Misconception 1: Theatre means acting.

These activities do not require any acting skills. No memorization of lines. No being alone in a spotlight and reciting words. When you speak, it is usually when you are moved to and the words find their way. Not knowing how to act can be an advantage because you come with fewer preconceptions about being a "good" actor.

- Misconception 2: Theatre means stage and props.

  These games require only space and people. Everything else is created and given life by the people. Think of how, as a child, you could spend endless hours making up things. These games do not need materials or stage or printouts or books. They can be played anywhere and anytime. I have played these games during field visits and in hallways, gardens, and conference rooms.

- Misconception 3: Noises created by the games will be too high.

  The theatre activities draw heavily on silence, so you are not likely to disturb others. Rather, the silence will give you and the participants take a mental break from the continuous talk and will help calm down everyone's nerves. You might even find yourself in a state of flow where things simply seem to happen smoothly without speaking.

Although technically not a misconception, we might assume that theatre can only be done through in-person contact. Not true. In the past year, I have conducted multiple virtual theatre workshops using online, but real-time embodied activities. These activities offer different strengths and can still be effective. In this manual, I have highlighted such activities as Online-friendly.

Why these three values?

This book/manual focuses on three values: Connection, Compassion, and Courage- that I have addressed continually in my years of theatre

experience. Besides their obvious importance as lived values in any organizational context, why specifically these three values?

First, these values are experienced differently in our bodies- so it is easier to design activities that focus on achieving them. Second, they have different goals- while connection and compassion lean towards providing a felt sense of strength, the courage dimension is more about the urge to do. Third, they build on each other. Connection and compassion are strengths that propel and sustain courage. Courage, on the other hand, translates these strengths towards more impact.

The three values are interwoven and most activities in this manual can be used to foreground all three dimensions. You may structure your workshop to build values in the same order as organized in this book or you can start from a dimension (say, Compassion) which you feel compelled to. You can always use the debrief of the activities to highlight all the dimensions of connection, compassion and courage.

Who is this book for?

I wrote this book for four audiences:

1. Educators in school settings: Perhaps the primary audience. Although geared for schools and colleges, the activities in this manual can be modified for other organizations. I have used these activities, with a bit of tweaking, with 40-60 year old school principals and policy makers. The playful aspect of these activities makes them applicable to a wide age group.

2. Corporate trainers: Those who navigate the complex world of business organizations and would like to enliven their team building, innovation and leadership workshops with body-based activities.

3. Community workers: Those who are in direct contact with and often work with communities to support social justice.

4. Professionals in theatre: Those who want to innovate or build toolkits of theatre activities.

Some readers might be new to conducting theatre in their sessions. So, in the next chapter, I provide guidelines on what to make sure is available and elaborate on the structure of each theatre activity. I will also talk about some self-care and debrief tips that I have found very useful in my journey.

Finally, you can also reach out to me with questions about the book and about conducting workshops through the website- https://theatreforall.mystrikingly.com/.

Play on!

Chapter II

Structure and Self-care

Two months ago during an in-person improv session, one of the participants did not pass the word "whoosh" along with a swaying arm gesture to the person on her right- as was to be done under the activity. Instead, she changed the word to "brr" leaving the person on her right confused about what to do- and everyone broke into nervous laughter. Since we had just begun to unify the group's energy and get into a rhythm, her action brought us back to square one. When I asked her why she changed the keyword, she replied," I am free to do anything under improvisation, am I not?"

I was glad that the brave participant shared her belief of improv-as-freedom because it helped me improvise and share with the group about what freedom is and what improvisation means. Freedom is not "anything is allowed". Paradoxically, freedom is exercised best within structure and boundaries. In a game of football, if the size of the field is unlimited, it might seem to provide infinite freedom of movement but it will kill the game. A boundary, counter-intuitively, frees the players

to try more things to score. Even "free play", I would argue, has implicit structure and boundaries. For instance, the activities are bounded within a safe space, need to be perceived as engaging and must not involve hurt.

When watching a show like *Whose Line is it Anyway*, people might think improv is about making things up and the actors are just naturally talented. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Successful improv builds on rules like "Yes and…" and "Make your partner look good" and only when actors adhere to those rules, does an act emerge that we truly enjoy.

Structure is important because, without it, a classroom/workshop plan is a bunch of things thrown in together and the learning is haphazard or incoherent. A structure also provides support for teachers and facilitators to fall back upon when things are becoming chaotic. A good structure will allow you and participants to have a sense of control while letting things emerge. Finally, having a regular structure takes away the waste of energy in trying to reinvent things every time and saves time in answering procedural questions.

I divide structure into facilitator guidelines and session format.

Facilitator Guidelines

I prefer the term guidelines as compared to rules because guidelines are gentler and are usually not linked to punishment or some kind of putative action associated with rules. Also, guidelines imply flexibility.

I offer a few guidelines below and depending on your relationship with your participants, feel free to tweak them in ways that respect the needs of your participants and you.

I often begin my session with a flipchart or newsprint wherein I have written out some of my guidelines. I explain each of them to the participants and check for doubts. Sometimes, I modify them or add a few

ones depending on what participants tell me (e.g., punctuality). The guidelines remain in sight throughout the session.

- Own your experience. Use "I" statements. Instead of saying, "It was strange how you depicted a classroom", say "I am confused about how you depicted a classroom." That goes for the facilitator too.

- Maintain silence. If any activity provokes laughter, request participants to take a breath and compose themselves. Silence will lead to greater insights and reflections.

- Gentle stretching. Learning often happens around rough edges and that can sometimes be resisted. Hence, try to nudge everyone to try something new. Nothing drastic but offer them the space of non-judgmental listening that might lead to opening up.

- Allow feelings. ALL feelings are allowed. If a participant or you have tears, that is normal and okay. Anger can be held in the same way. Although the activities herein are usually non-intrusive, please exercise your judgement in stopping an activity if it feels the right thing to do. Avoid the urge to push and probe too deep. *Theatre can be therapeutic, but it is not therapy.*

- What occurs in the session, stays with all those who were present and does not get discussed outside. A variation is that participants may discuss what happened if their sharing is only about their experience and does not involve naming or judging others. (e.g., Today, I felt moved when I heard the words "poverty hurts more than health").

Session Format

- Each session is timed for 45 minutes. If you have more time, take a break after 45-60 minutes and regroup after recharging. Similarly,

when working with adults, 45 minutes is often a good time to give a break especially to those who are unused to physical exercise.

- Each session starts with a 5-minute warm-up, followed by a main activity (25 minutes), a reflection with debrief (10 minutes), and then a 5-minute closure.

- Ensure that warm-up and closure are always done. A warm-up brings people into the present and primes them to go deeper. A closure ties everything done during that session and participants will leave feeling more peaceful and organized. Most of the closures can be compressed into less than a minute if there is very little time left.

- I have provided a list and description of warm-up and closure activities and these can be repeated for different types of main activities.

- The default seating arrangement for each activity is the circle. Ensure that the circle does not become a U or is broken by empty spaces. Be seated at the same or lower level as the participants with everyone preferably on the floor if possible. Chairs are okay too but I would urge you to use them only if the participants cannot stand. If some participants cannot sit on the floor or stand, respectfully acknowledge and accept their need and adjust.

Now that structure is in place, let us also consider how you can give your best to these activities. Self-care is often misunderstood as only pampering. It is much more and can be hard to do because it sounds boring or requires discipline. But self-care, or what some call as self-facilitation, is powerful- so let us look at why and how to do it.

Self-care/Self-facilitation

I have often realized that when I enter a session with a sense of calm and grounded-ness, its effect is calming. And when I am harried or hustled, the participants and I feel bewildered. Often, 1 minute of deep breathing before the session begins can save 15 minutes of chaos control. So, for self-care before, during, and after the session, I would suggest the following:

- Breathe. A self-care practice that will hold your hand forever. Count your breaths or simply label them as in or out or say "As I breathe, I offer myself compassion; As I breathe out, I offer everyone compassion". If the breath does not give you peace, focus on a sensation that grounds you. What works for you is what is good for you.

- Move. If you are too emotional (say, a big argument just before the session), take a 2-minute brisk walk and feel the emotion move through you and drain away. Long exhalations work very well. Sometimes I walk a mile after the session to let things process after an intense session. I usually feel lighter and more energized.

- Drink water. The most obvious and yet overlooked self-care practice. So many times, have I noticed myself feeling ruffled or rushed and then realized that the last sip of water I had was over 2 hours ago.

- Be kind to yourself. What you and your participants do is hard work and often very messy. Unless you are kind to yourself, you are not likely to extend the same kindness to others. I still struggle with wanting things to go perfectly after planning well and am learning to be kind to myself when they don't. I remind myself that I can only act by my intention to do good- I can't control

how others will react to it. And I will screw up at times. Hey, everyone does!

- Be patient and persistent. Sometimes the session will seem to be going nowhere. Keep plugging away. Like a well which takes a bit of digging to give sweet water, keep moving into the activity.

- Sprinkle some humour. Oh yes, one of the most important things to do especially when you realize that you have screwed up. Take appropriate blame and then laugh at yourself. I can often see myself becoming all serious about making things equitable and then realize that it's silly to shift the direction of a river in a day. I try to laugh, recharge, and then do my bit.

In this chapter, we looked at how structure will support you and your session while providing excellent opportunities for progress. We also looked at tips for self-care before, during, and after the session. In the next chapter, we look at the warm-up activities that you can use for your sessions.

Chapter III

Warm-ups

I got stuck in a meeting with the CEO and ended up 10 minutes late for the start of a session I had to facilitate. To provide the participants with an experience of the "meat" of the session, I decided to move directly into the main activity after the introductions were made. I struggled a lot- had to give directions continually- and participants were breaking into nervous laughter throughout the session. As soon as the 45 minutes were over, I realized my mistake of not doing warm-up activities with the group.

Warm-up activities are as essential as the main activity. They are like the stretch before heavy exercise- the prelude before the music builds up. They allow you and the participants to come to the present and leave the worries and concerns where they belong- outside the session. Encourage laughter to build energy and presence. Here are a few warm-ups that I suggest.

Amoeba Tag

This is a tag game. Great for connection. One of the participants is chosen as the amoeba. An amoeba is a single-cell life form with the characteristic that it moves slowly towards its food, engulfs it and then

carries on. So, this participant has to move s-l-o-w-l-y just like an amoeba and whoever she touches, joins her and the amoeba expands. It works better if the participant menacingly shouts "amoeeebaaa" as she moves to give the impression of a predator. As the number of participants who get caught increases, the amoeba becomes bigger and is usually more difficult to escape from.

Bah!

Great for connection. Participants stand in a circle and pass energy to person next to them by saying **Bah** while using their hands as if they are flinging an object. You start with doing an energetic and loud Bah to the person on your left (say, Aman) and then Aman passes the Bah (the words and the hand movement) to the person on his left. The Bah is like a pulse or reverberation that will travel the full circle back to you.

Inevitably, the energy with which Bah is passed will vary. Some people will say Bah with energy and some will say it softly with almost no body movement. So, in the next round of Bah, suggest that people pass only the energy that they receive- no more, no less. During this round, the energy might fizzle out much faster and the Bah might be no more than a whisper by the time it reaches you. Laugh about it as you point out how we need to sustain energy. Keep doing the Bah circles till you get a strong Bah back to you.

Loving name, Loving touch

Everyone keeps walking in the space. The activity begins when one person touches a participant (say, Aman) on the shoulder. After being touched, Aman has to call out a participant's name (say, Betty). Now Betty has to go and touch someone else on the shoulder as everyone continues to walk.

In other words, you have to do something different when touched or when you hear your name. If you hear your name, touch someone

else gently on the shoulder. If you are touched on the shoulder, call out someone's name. Sounds simple, but requires mindfulness.

Emphasize that people play this by bringing a sense of love and caring. Encourage people to say a person's name or touch someone who they do not know or usually interact with. Also, there are no mistakes- if people inadvertently touch someone else after they are touched, incorporate that and keep going. Use their action to have more than one thread spreading love!

Purple Monkey, Yellow Rabbit

Great for connection especially when you feel that people need to come to the present because they are lost in their heads. Excellent for connecting strangers and increasing energy levels.

Participants are in a circle and then toss fictional animals to each other after getting eye contact. You begin with miming that you have an animal in your hands and then toss it to someone across the circle naming the animal- say, 'purple monkey'. The person across the circle has to mime catching the purple monkey. Now, this person will toss the monkey quickly to someone else in the circle with whom she has established eye contact- again saying "purple monkey" as she throws it. And so on. Remind participants to mime the catching and tossing.

Remind participants to mime the catching and tossing. After a minute or so as the purple monkey is being tossed and caught, you introduce a new animal- say, 'yellow rabbit' and toss it to someone else in the circle who is empty-handed. Again, as you toss the animal, say aloud, "yellow rabbit". Now, two fictional animals (with their names uttered aloud) are being tossed and caught in the circle by four different people. You can keep increasing the number of fictional animals till almost everyone is actively either catching or tossing. Of course, you can name the animals you want.

Go within

A different kind of warm-up that tones down the energy and brings mindfulness to the space. Great for compassion. This is a slightly longer warm-up of about 8 minutes. SILENCE is a must. Ask participants to walk around (2 minutes). Then ask them to stop and lie down such that they have enough space around them to stretch their limbs or roll a couple of times without getting into each other's way. Ask them to go within and lie silently for a couple of minutes. Go through these instructions slowly. "Raise your arms as if you are stretching towards the ceiling…feel the energy in your arms, your fingers….now slowly relax your shoulders in such a way that the arms remain up but you can hold this posture…..now slowly bring your arms down and cross them across your chest…CLOSE YOUR EYES….deep breath in…..exhale…another deep breath…exhale…..Go within yourself and feel the sensations, the different nerves within your body…..Try and listen to what it says….Experience areas where there is pressure….Just notice them…how they move as you shift.

Shift to another position, whatever your body feels like moving into…maybe more comfortable, maybe more stretched…whatever feels right…Follow your intuition…Notice where your head is…shift your head a bit and let your body follow as the position of the head changes…feel the gravity. (Repeat instructions in this paragraph –feel free to modify them or add to them so that most participants go through at least 3-4 postures).

Experiment with stillness if you feel like it. If the body feels like moving, move it…if your thoughts wander…gently bring them back to your body. Now slowly come out of this and start getting up at your own pace…be gentle and let your body decide when to get up on your feet…."

Check-in

Quick activity to embody how everyone is feeling. Great for compassion. Get the group in a circle. Give the following instruction: "Now we will

do a quick check-in. I want you to show how you are feeling right now. You can use your body or any sounds – but no intelligible words". It could be useful that when you propose this, you are the first one to show how you are feeling. Be honest and don't think too much. The more on-the-spot your expression is, the more it will encourage participants. Once you have shown your movement and/or sound, encourage the person on your left or right to go next and then go around the circle. There is no evaluation. Encourage laughter.

As a variation, once you show how you are feeling, everyone mimics what you showed before the baton passes to the next person.

Lines of four

Happy activity. Requires a music player with speakers. A different kind of refresher if the group is feeling heavy. An instant energy charger. Everyone moves around the space and gets one behind the other into lines of four. The person in the front is the leader. He or she will listen to the music and make a move that the people behind him will mimic and follow. As soon as you change the music, he or she will move to the end of the line and the next person in line is the new leader. The lines need not be anchored to one place. Change the music every 10-15 seconds. Play for at least 5 minutes.

Connection through Creation

Active visual listening. Good for connection. Stand in a circle. In silence, people will pass a gift to someone else. To make sure that the person who receives the gift knows what it is, request people to be elaborate in their mimes- without talking. Request that the people receiving the gift show an acknowledgement and appreciation of whatever they receive with their face and body. (For example, if they receive a flower, they can hold it tenderly and eyes might show joy).

Once there is silence and everyone's attention is focused on the facilitator, the facilitator mimes giving a flower to the person on his left.

Again, it is important to make the mime clear by action, e.g. smelling the imaginary flower before giving. One tip is to really "see" the flower and then give it- your face and hands will follow your imagination smoothly. Without talking, the person who received the flower will choose to do an action with the flower. This could be smelling the flower again, caressing the flower, putting it in a vase, or even transforming it into a cap.

Magic is allowed. Now this person will pass their object to the person on the left. And so on, till the final object is received by the facilitator. When you receive the final gift, look at it tenderly and then at everyone else slowly as if thanking each person with your eyes. Then, break the silence and say thank you! During this activity, be prepared that some people will not do anything with the object and some will transform it into something ambiguous. It is OK. You will also notice giggles and laughter at the magic (like transforming a flower into a balloon). This activity helps the group leave with a sense of something that they created together. The key here is the attitude of receiving the gift. In case, you see that some people are dismissive or there is a sense of unease, take a couple of moments to acknowledge that and suggest a few questions for homework: What happens when we receive something? What does it truly mean to appreciate a gift? Which gifts am I taking for granted? Begin the next session with a 2-3 minute debrief of these questions if possible.

Here are three online-friendly warm-up activities.

Movements

This works well when at least 6 participants have their video on. Ask participants to get up from the chair and say that you will begin a simple movement and they would mimic it (e.g., a shoulder rotation). After a few seconds, call out the name of a participant and add, "Give us another movement." Now, everyone (including you) will do that movement.

After a few seconds, call out another participant...till everyone has had a chance to lead a movement.

As a variation, ask the participants for a body movement that captures what they are feeling. Feel free to move out of the screen for dramatic effect. For instance, when you touch your feet, you might not be visible at all on the virtual screen.

Favourite Insect

This activity is also great to break the ice and it establishes a pattern which you might use later in the session. Each participant will think of their most/least favourite insect. The facilitator calls out an insect name and then the name of a participant, for example- Dragonfly Manoj. Now, Manjoy will say aloud the insect name that he has in mind (which has to be different from yours) and call out another participant whose name has not yet been called. This goes on till all the participants have declared their insect and called out a participant name. The last participant will end up calling your name which will complete a pattern. Encourage participants to do for one more round by repeating the insect name and naming the "same" participant who they had called the previous time. As a variation, use adjectives, terms of endearment, animals instead of insect, favourite song title.

New Meaning

This online activity not only brings full attention to what we do but, similar to the favourite insect activity, can also be used to create a pattern. You begin the activity by doing an easy visible mime of repeated action (say, brushing your teeth, combing your hair, stroking your chin) and then saying repeatedly an unrelated verb (say, painting, reading, watching). The idea is to create an action that the verb is very unlikely to mean. As you keep saying the word and doing the action, everyone else mimics it Once everyone has mimicked it once, you ask someone else to now to do an action and say a word that is unrelated

to the action. And so on- till everyone has had a chance to create new meaning. The activity is surprisingly hard to do (people will point up and say - Sky!) - but it is very physical and the laughter it generates is wonderful.

In this chapter, we considered the importance of Warm-up activities as the necessary prelude to a melody. The next 3 chapters will elaborate activities specifically focused on the three dimensions of connection, compassion and courage.

Remember, if you are new to the participants, please read Chapter 2 for becoming familiar with the space and creating trust. If you are familiar with the participants and have their trust, then encourage everyone to get into a circle for a warm-up activity. Make sure you can see everyone and everyone can see you without bending or stepping back. Often some participants might be obscured or they might hide behind someone because they are feeling shy. This is understandable. Be gentle and ask them to step forward.

Each session works best with a conventional format- **Warm-Up, Main-Activity and Closure**. Description for the activities usually focuses on five aspects:

1. Rationale- Why and how the activity addresses the dimension
2. Process- Step by step guide
3. Variation- Different ways to do the activity that make it appeal to different participants. Not all activities have variations.
4. Debrief- Questions for reflection. Try and give participants 2-3 minutes to reflect/write before they speak.
5. Reflections- Challenges or nuances that I experienced when conducting the activity

The next four pages also show a few pictures that I clicked of participants in different settings. I use these images with due organizational permission.

Figure III.1: Truth

Figure III.1 Each person individually deciding to symbolize "Truth". Notice how one participant is hidden behind another!

Figure III.2: Leadership

Figure III.2 A self-moulded image of Leadership. The image was organically arrived at without speaking a word.

Figure III.3: Coaching

Figure III.3 shows an image of "Coaching". Notice how the levels at which different participants are seated or standing add meaning.

Figure III.4: Coaching

Figure III.4 shows another group's image of "Coaching". Notice here how the standing positions and the facial expressions add meaning.

No more Out

Before I conclude, an important word about the spirit of the activities. Let me share an incident that occurred a few days ago in Eklavya Bhopal, India.

At a teacher workshop, we began with "Bah". In this activity, everyone stands in a circle. One person says 'Bah' loudly and passes this word (like a hot ball) quickly to her neighbor on the left. You pass on 'exactly' the amount of 'Bah' energy you receive. No more, no less.

As soon as I explained how Bah works, a teacher looks at me and asks, "If someone does not follow the rules, is he ...Out?"

We have a long history with "Out". In schools, we were asked literally to get 'out' when we did not do homework or argue with the teacher. In families, a daughter is 'out' if she breaks the rule of not getting the approved partner. At office, 'out' is inevitable if you can't manage politics.

Out means that you don't belong here and we don't want to even see you anymore. It is scary. We need others to survive and an 'out' means you are on your own to survive. Out = exclusion.

Just the threat of 'out' is enough to manipulate us to conform.

Those who argue for 'out' say that it is the only solution for those not being able to play well. Competition is outing others. And often, "out" is more about power, than ability.

We are so conditioned, so habituated, that even in a playful warm-up activity like Bah, we ask if there is an 'out'.

The teacher's question made me stop. **There is no 'out' in Bah and in other warm-up and main activities throughout this book.**

In Bah, when a person flouts a rule, she must come to the center of the circle and make an "Ouui" sound which acknowledges that she screwed up. Then, she returns to her place and now starts a new, loud "Bah". We move on.

There is far more laughter in this version. Plus, the one who makes a mistake, far from being excluded (forced to just watch or leave), is given another chance- to begin the game afresh.

Everyone sees that you remain "in" after making a mistake. There is no threat to survival, there is just the promise of growth.

I am not asking that we throw 'out' from all games. But do all games need an 'out'?

In almost a decade of playing Bah, no one I know has chosen to step out.

What makes it more fascinating is that I see people deliberately make mistakes so that they can do an "Ouui". I see them come to the center, first giggling, then laughing loudly at their mistakes- as if releasing years of toxic punishments. Often, cackling laughter at realizing on how mistakes are usually just a temporary speed bump in making decisions.

We all deserve such laughter, such chances to get back in the game. To start afresh. For too long, we have been punishing ourselves, excluding ourselves from living because we screwed up once or because we might screw up and get "out".

Instead, let's gather around "in" a circle. Let's decide that no one will be pushed "out" if they err. Let's give the rules of "Bah" a chance. What do you say?

Chapter IV

Connection

I was conducting my first workshop with a group of senior education policy officials from New Delhi. These were 30 people, all of them at least 10 years older than I was. There was a nervous energy in the room because this was a mix of people at different hierarchical positions. After warm-ups, I began with an activity called May-I that involved saying Yes to exchanging your place with someone else in the circle. As we moved deeper into this activity, all such exchanges were to be done in silence. For the next 3 minutes, there was no talk as 31 people moved across the room as if they were one mind and heart. I was one of them.

How to establish a genuine connection among participants is difficult because we often operate in individual silos. Although you can intellectually convince a person that he is connected to everyone else, it rarely gets encoded as a feeling.

Connection means more a felt sense rather than an intellectual exercise. Hence, for this section, the debrief questions help explore and make meaning of the feelings that come up and the sensations experienced. Usually, connection evokes a sense of enlargement and of coming to a place of rest. You might see participants smile and the forehead crinkles vanish as the connection gets deeper.

May I...Yes (Limited movement, Likely neutral)

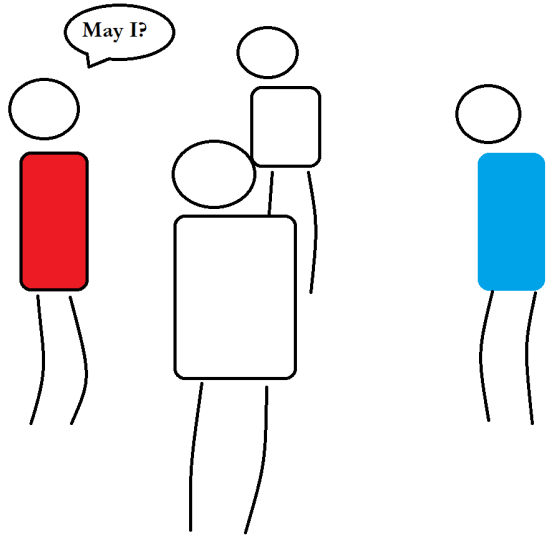
Rationale

An activity that encourages participants to lean into their feelings through brief, but intense experiences of connection. I draw this activity from improv theatre because this is an embodied form of saying "Yes" to what happens. Also, this activity uses words and then moves into silence, so it provides a move from the known territory of words into silence.

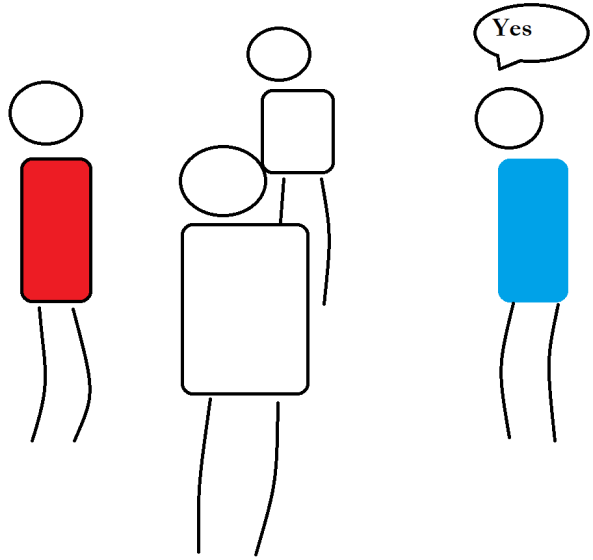
Process

- Phase 1- "May I"- "Yes"

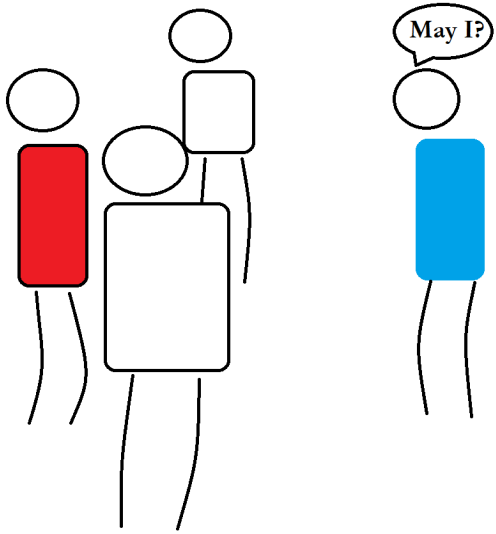
    1. A person in the circle (say, A) establishes eye contact with another person in the circle (say, B). I have also attached five images to illustrate the process visually.
    2. A looks at B and says aloud,"May I?" to ask permission to move to her position.
    3. B responds by looking back at A and saying "Yes". (B cannot say NO).
    4. A begins to walk/move slowly towards B only AFTER he hears "Yes".
    5. Now B, while standing at her position, establishes eye contact with someone else in the circle (say, C) and asks "May I?"
    6. C responds by looking back at B and saying "Yes".
    7. B begins to walk towards C. A keeps walking till he reaches B's vacated position.



A asks B "May I"



B responds with "Yes". A walk towards B



B says "May I" to C

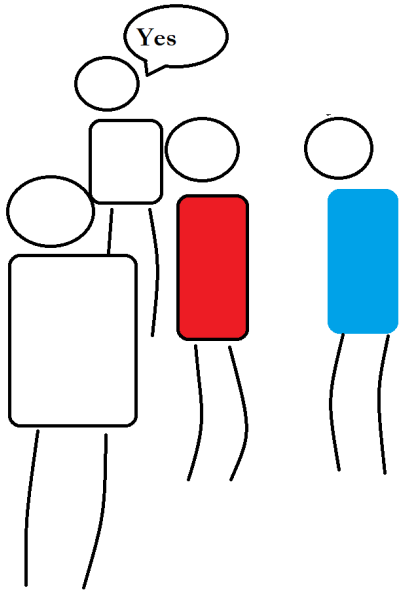
8. C begins a new cycle of asking permission from another person in the circle with a "May I" and the activity continues.

Few important thing to note here.

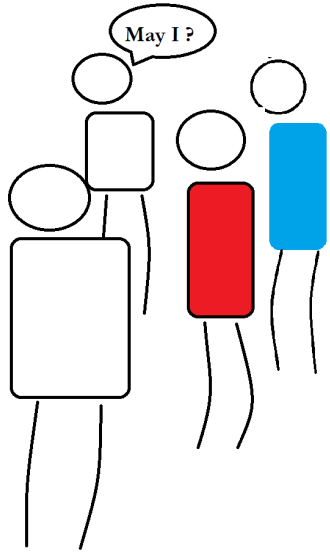
First, a person will not move from their position till he or she has heard a "Yes" to their "May I". It is worthwhile often to demonstrate that moving-while-saying "May I" contravenes the rules. In my experience, the rush and anxiety will still have people who start moving even before asking permission or hearing a clear "Yes". When they do so, ask them to notice what happened. Do not stop the activity because that can make it embarrassing.

Second, remember to be a part of this circle, not an outsider.

Finally, keep a close eye on people's eyes when they seek and give permission.



C responds with Yes- while A walks towards B.



C's turn to ask "May I"

Remain in phase 1 for about 5 minutes till you feel that participants can hold still as they seek permission and there is some level of smoothness.

- Phase 2- "May I"- Nod
  The process is just like phase 1, except that now the "Yes" is replaced by a nod,

  1. A establishes eye contact with another person in the circle- B. (
  2. A asks permission to switch places and says aloud looking at B "May I?"
  3. B responds by looking back at Arnold and nodding a Yes. B does not speak the word "Yes".
  4. A begins to move towards B.
  5. As A begins to move towards B, she establish eye contact with C and asks "May I?"
  6. C responds by looking back at B and nods a Yes. The word "Yes" is not spoken.
  7. B begins to move towards C.
  8. C repeats the cycle of asking permission from another person in the circle and the activity continues.

     In my experience, without a spoken "Yes", the activity proceeds more smoothly. Again, play for about 5 minutes till there is a level of smooth operation.

- Phase 3- Silent May I- Yes
  The process is just like phase 1, except that now both "May I" and "Yes" are silent,

  1. A establishes eye contact with another person in the circle- B

2. A asks permission to switch places by looking at B and using her facial expression (raised eyebrow or an upward tilt of the head). No spoken words.
3. B responds by looking back at A and nodding a Yes.
4. A begins to move towards B.
5. As A begins to move towards B, she establishes eye contact with someone else in the circle- C and seeks permission by their facial expression or a nod.
6. C responds by looking back at B and nods "Yes".
7. B begins to move towards C.
8. C repeats the cycle of asking permission from another person in the circle and the activity continues.

There is complete silence in the third phase of the activity as people are moving. Encourage people to notice their feelings. Some laughter is inevitable and it is helpful to bring people back to the present with a gentle "Let's be quiet please".

It is possible that during any of the phases more than 2 people move because two people, who are next to each other, might mistakenly say "Yes" or nod to someone who asks permission. In such a case, it is important to keep the game going without figuring out who is the right person to move. This is about incorporating whatever is happening. If there are six people seeking permission at the same time, wonderful.

Debrief

Everyone comes together as you ask the following questions:

1. What came up for you?
2. How were the three rounds different in your experience? What was happening?

3. When did you feel more connected to others?
4. When it was your turn to say Yes, how did it feel? How did it feel immediately after saying Yes, when you had to ask "May I"?
5. How does it feel to receive a Yes? How can we build a Yes culture?
6. What did silence do? Is talk necessary for connection?

Reflections

I remember how when doing this activity with young adults in a teaching college, there was considerable chaos in the first two phases. Then, all of a sudden, the silent request and acceptance shifted the dynamics and there was perfect synchronization. For all of us, the silence was a game-changer. It made us wonder when talk clutters communication.

Puppet, anyone? (Varied movement, potentially triggering)

Rationale

We lead at least some part of our lives tied by people's actions- what they say and do- around us. And in those moments, we are not so different from being a puppet. So far as we deliberately choose being a puppet or see it as play, we can snap out of it. At times, it is liberating to come out of this hypnosis and see how much freedom we really have. When people watch news incessantly and then blame the media for creating "bad" stories, I am often tempted to tell them that it is they who have the remote to change the channel or keep aside the mobile. Even in a corporate environment which encourages agency, people might subconsciously become tied to other's political games. Interestingly, we all

love seeing puppet work and do some silly stuff. So, this activity does a deliberate visual puppetry.

Process

1. Divide people into groups of 3.

2. Each person in the group will silently decide to observe any one of the following body parts- hand, finger, elbow, knee, eye- brow, or foot- a body part that can move rapidly.

3. Now they will imagine as if one of their body parts is tied to that body part with a 2-3 feet thread. So, if Bobbie's head is tied by an invisible thread to Aman's hand then as Aman's hand moves, so will Bobbie's head and the rest of my body might follow (see image)

4. As the activity starts, encourage people to stay within a 6 foot wide imaginary circle. See what happens.

5. Ask them to be very slow and then increase the movement of the body part and then slow it down again.

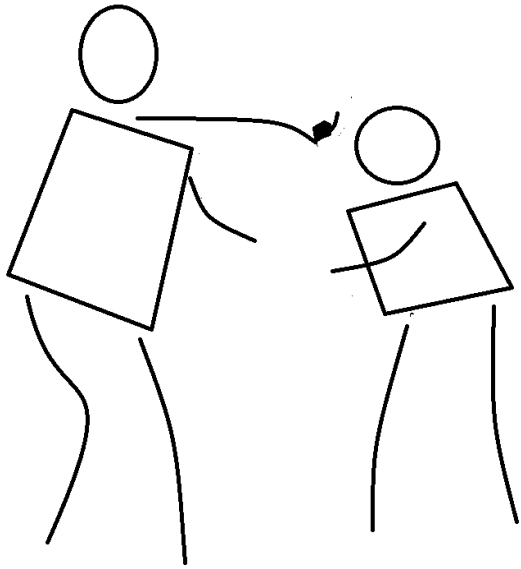
Variation

Have rotations. Each person can be the puppeteer for 2 minutes.

Instead of one, two of the body parts are now tied by threads. So, Bobbie's head is still tied invisibly to Aman's hands and her knee is tied to his head. On the other hand, Aman's left knee follows Charu's head and his eyes are tied invisibly to Charu's index finger. And so on..This can get real whacky, real fast.

Debrief

1. What did this activity evoke?

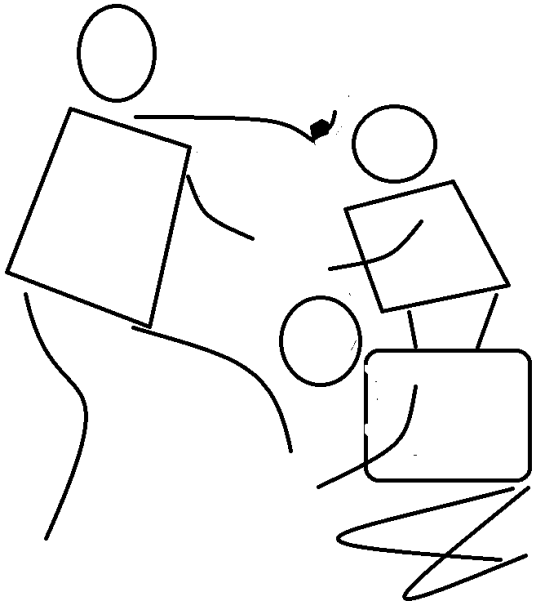


Aman leading Bobbie

2. . Was it easy to do? Why? Why not?
3. What did you notice about yourself while doing this?
4. How did you feel when you were moving a lot?
5. Were you aware how your movements were affecting someone else?
6. How did you feel when you were the puppet?
7. What does this activity make you think about connection and vulnerability? Authority and submission?
8. Who was the real leader in the group? Why?

Reflections

I have found it fascinating how people play with this activity and what it says about their own leader or followership. It is great fun when the



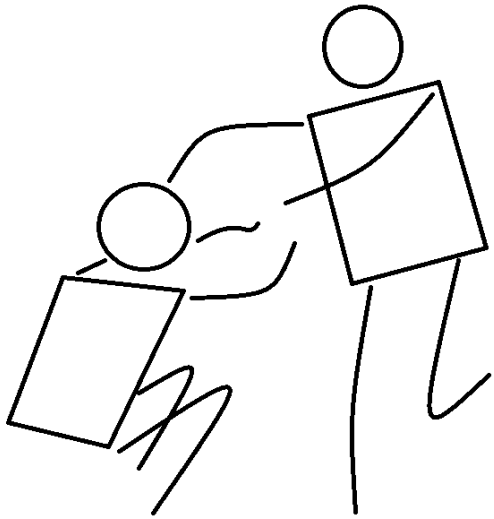
Aman, Bobbie and Charu leading each other

pace suddenly changes- like immediately slowing down after a couple of hectic movements. Personally, this is sometimes a vulnerable exercise for me. As a puppet, I have often felt discomfort feeling under the control of someone and as a lead, I have felt extremely responsible for the safety and concern of those who are puppets. I feel these moments are precious as they clarify my own reactions to authority- great learning for a 10-minute exercise.

Complete the image (Varied movement, potentially triggering)

Rationale

This activity explores connection through an unspoken and previously undiscussed agreement of what things may mean- a kind of tacit knowl-



Completing the image

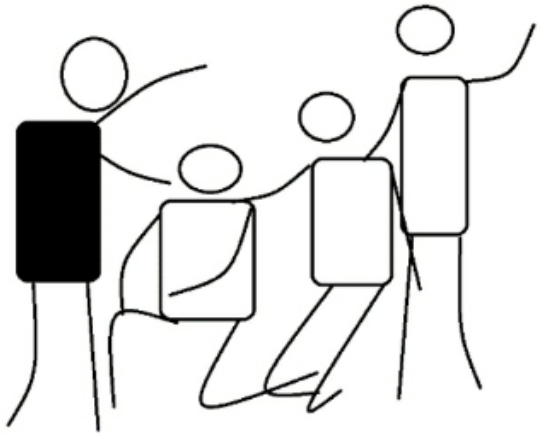
edge that connects us. This activity also allows great reflections on how small gestures can transform interpretation. I have also found this activity good for team building and getting comfortable with touch. I have adapted it based on my experience in playback theatre groups.

Process

1. Everyone gets into a circle.

2. Ask for a volunteer to come to the centre of the circle and strike any pose. Something she can sustain for a 4-5 seconds.

3. Now you enter into the circle and say, "I complete this picture/image" while you go ahead and pose with the volunteer to make a picture/image that creates a relationship between you two. There is no right or wrong way to pose. Go with your gut feel. The relationship is something that exists in your mind. Each person will interpret the picture of you two differently. Speed is important. Don't try to get the "right" image.

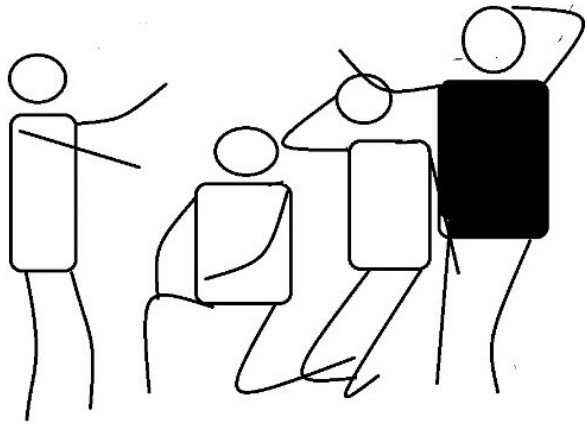


Aman directs the image

4. As you freeze, ask her (the volunteer) to unfreeze and get into a new pose to create a new picture/image with the frozen image. As she poses, you describe your action and say, "I unfreeze, say thank you and I make another pose that relates to her". You freeze. Keep describing "Now, my partner relaxes, says "Thank you" and chooses another pose…"

5. Keep doing this for 3 or 4 poses. Try different things- Touching, Varying the distance between her and you, lying down, changing facial expressions, and so on. Be playful. And, if needed, ask the people to notice how small things such as the distance, facial expression or gesture could shift the meaning.

6. Invite another volunteer to join you and the three of you make a frozen image. At each time, only one person unfreezes and then joins back (e.g., Aman and Bobbie freeze, Carol joins to form a group image. As soon as Carol freezes, Aman says thank you and unfreezes to make a new image (Bobbie and Carol are frozen). Then Bobbie unfreezes, says thank you and rejoins the group in a new image, then Carol…)



Bobbie directs the image with Aman in it

7. Now divide people into groups of 3-6 and play without saying "thank you". You can choose to do a demonstration by asking a participant (say, Aman) to create a group image comprising others in the group See image where Aman (in black) now actively directs 3 others to pose in a specific way as shown in the image. Give Aman 15 seconds.

8. Then, ask one of the frozen participants (say, Bobbie) to unfreeze to come out of the image and revise the group image (see next image). Aman is now a part of Bobbie's group image as she repositions others (see next image). Remind everyone to go with their gut feel and simply "play". Tell them that wrong image. If they get stuck thinking, it is fine too.

9. If there is laughter, gently remind the participants about silence.

10. Encourage people to experiment with distance and levels.

11. After about 2 minutes of creating group images, ask everyone to stop, relax and remain silent.

12. Tell them that you will now call out words. Ask them to let the words influence the images they make together.

13. Ask for questions or clarifications. Remind about silence. Keep moving around and touch participants if they get into talking.

14. Call out a word from the following list and ask them to start creating images together. Suggested words include:

    - Anger
    - Happiness
    - Rain
    - Bully
    - Plans and the garden
    - The gardener and the garden
    - Family item Strict teacher/boss and students
    - Compassionate teacher/boss with students
    - (Their) organization

15. Each participant gets about 30 seconds to create/change their group image. Try and start with 45 seconds and then gradually reduce it to 30 seconds.

Variation

Use sound instead of the body. The participants get into groups of 2-3 to create a symphony. Aman begins with a regular sound (e.g., bing, bing, bing…) and then Bobbie joins with her own (e.g., bong bong bong). Then after a few seconds when the rhythm is established, Aman stops and creates a new sound to complete Bobbie's sound (Tiktok, tiktok). They can play with rhythm and pitch and even experiment how creating a deliberate gap can be useful. They can use objects around them too

to create unique sounds. Claps usually don't work as well or have the same flexibility as voice.

Another variation is to play with time. Give people 2 minutes instead of 30 seconds to create their images.

Or, do multiple rounds with the same word to see if people stick to their original creations or change it.

Debrief

1. How did you feel when you were completing the image?
2. How easy or difficult was it for you to change a pre-existing image?
3. How did your past experience influence what you saw and created?
4. What was your favorite moment? Why?
5. How does this activity, in your opinion, relate to connection?
6. How does it alter or redefine connection for you?

Reflections

For me, this has always been a thought-provoking activity with every participant age group. I usually insist on silence and move around the different images being created. Sometimes, I also allow one group at a time to unfreeze and walk around to notice the images of the other groups and how different they are. In a way, it solidifies our knowledge that the same idea (e.g., family) can have so many true interpretations. Paradoxically, what is also amazing is how consistently the suggestion of classroom invokes an image of a person standing and pointing (presumably, the teacher) and the remaining people (presumably, the students) sitting passively and taking notes. I sometimes ask the group to re-create

the image and then ask them to stretch their imagination and infuse it with a value (e.g. collaboration, kindness, competition).

Complete the Story (Limited movement, Likely neutral, Online friendly)

Rationale

We are often tied to the stories that our minds create about how others should be and that creates separation. Instead of dancing with what others say or do, we want to censor their words and their actions. This activity builds connection by demonstrating that when we connect with others by doing what we can do instead of pushing our version of how others should be, delightful stories emerge- just like magic.

Process

1. Divide participants into groups of 5-8 people.

2. Each group decides on a random word (preferably a noun) to inspire a story that they will create together. (e.g. coffee, dustbin, galaxy, lentils)

3. A person in the group begins telling a story about the random word. However, she leaves the story hanging at a critical juncture and passes it on to another person in the group, B. For example- "I woke up today morning to see that there was no coffee. Suddenly …."

4. B completes the sentence from A and again leaves the story hanging before she passes it on to say, Carol. "Suddenly, the doorbell rang. When I opened the door…"

5. Everyone tries to keep the sentences short (say 10-15 words). This will prevent one person from hijacking the story and pushing it in one direction. (Keeping it short is hard!)

6. Try and have something concrete happen within each telling (e.g. no coffee, doorbell). A sentence that does not lead anywhere like if Carol says, "When I opened the door what I saw blew my mind and I did not know what to do"- doesn't really help advance the story.

7. Also, try and build on what is given to you. For example, if Bobbie says- "Suddenly, I decided to read the newspaper"- it dismisses Aman's offer of doing something about the no-coffee problem.

8. The participants can end the story when they feel it has come to an end. There is no right or wrong ending.

9. Try to do at least 2-3 stories in each group and wrap up each story with no more than 15-16 sentences.

Variation

The participants have a limited number of words (say 12). This will make it easier to leave the story hanging to be completed by others. People may establish an order in which they will go or they can make it spontaneous by naming who will be the next person to speak at the beginning of their sentence.

Debrief

1. Who owned the story? How was that?

2. How easy or hard was it to let go of the stories you had in mind?

3. Is this how we normally listen? What is the difference between this kind of listening and the one we regularly engage in?

4. How did it feel when someone tried to be too clever or insistent on their version?

5. How was it to remain connected to the inspiration word?

6. Is connection always easy? How can we support it?

Reflections

Don't be taken in by the power of this seemingly 'fun' activity, Once the participants get into a flow- this is magic. Time and again this activity breaks people into laughter and they feel that it was impossible that they could have come up with something like this on their own.
In this chapter, I have offered activities to connect that go beyond an intellectual exercise to feel and develop connection as a sense. This sense is build through different explorations- the gentleness of May I, the instinctiveness of Complete the Image, the vulnerability of Puppets and the improvisation of Complete the Story. Connection applies equally to facilitation.
If you begin to feel a sense of disconnection with your participants, pause and see what you can do to connect with them. In the next chapter, we will consider activities to develop another transformative value- Compassion..

Chapter V

Compassion

We sit together as if we were three sides of a triangle. I was the observer as Susan spoke for the next few minutes and Macy listened. Macy did not take notes. I experienced an intense energy because Macy and I absorbed every word that Susan spoke and felt what she said. When it was my turn to speak, I talked about my recent experience of feeling sidelined because of my Indian accent when speaking english. I had not intended to, but the active listening made it supportive for me to share what was bothering me for the past few days. There was no fixing. No solutions were offered. But when Susan summarized what I had said, I was amazed because she caught on to the essence of what I had shared. I felt heard. I felt connected. I felt compassion for myself. I needed that.

If there is one skill and value that we can help each human become better at, I believe it must be compassion. We are so hard on ourselves and consequently each other that we rarely notice it.

My own journey in TO and playback, as I later realized, was driven by a desire to experience and express compassion. More importantly, compassion is often mistaken for weakness and erroneously considered as pity. This mistaken belief is what we will address in this chapter. Compassion is a strength based on a felt sense of shared human connec-

tion. Further, Compassion is not soft and mushy- it can be fierce when needed as it lifts you and others and encourages you to aspire towards what is important. Especially in corporate environments, which are often painted as cut-throat, compassion can build tremendous resilience. A compassionate CEO or a principal, can be fierce about achieving targets and about supporting her staff. I am still learning to be more compassionate to myself and others.

Truth Bench (Little movement, Likely neutral, online-friendly)

Rationale

This is one of the most underrated activities I learnt during improv. Whenever the scene-work became boring or flat, a truth bench would recharge our spirits. Truth bench requires no preparation and two chairs or the floor can serve as an imaginary bench. It is a heart-warming activity, especially when done with honouring participant experience. The activity approaches compassion by creating a "sense" of shared connection and noticing that even though our culture pushes us to be very unique and we have different experiences we share a fascinatingly common humanity.

Process

Two people sit on a bench and have a 3-4 minute conversation about an aspect of their lives based on a word/phrase given by the audience. Everyone else will witness silently. Everyone gets a chance to sit on the truth bench. The only requirement is that whatever they say must be true and personal. It might be helpful for the facilitator to do a demo round with a volunteer to set the stage. A few other guidelines will make it clearer:

1. Everyday words are often more evocative (e.g. apple, sun, home) as compared to the more complex and abstract ones (e.g. paraphernalia, leadership, motivation).

2. Please encourage the participants to not speak "about" the given inspiration. For instance, if the inspiration word is "banana", it is very likely that some people will get into a factual account of the types of bananas or how to prolong the life of bananas or where are bananas imported from and so on. Rather, the aim here is to talk about your connection with banana, often through stories- say, the time the bananas in your school bag got squished or how your grandpa loved especially the ones with black spots and ate them every morning.

3. Also, try and discourage participants from asking multiple questions (e.g. why did you feel that way?). The aim here is to share something personal and not put the other person on the spot by asking too many questions. If the group is too large (say >10), then after the first demo round, break into smaller groups of 4 and so they can do two truth-bench rounds of two people talking and the other two as observers/keeping time using a timer. When the timer goes off, ask the two people on the bench to bring the conversation to a natural close. Preferably, group people who do not know each other that well. Also, as a reminder, what gets talked about on the truth bench, stays in the room.

Variation

The cues for the conversation are written on different slips of paper and kept in a box. The participants take out a slip and talk about it for the time allotted. The audience does not need to see their cue. This variation works better only after the group has established trust. Possible cues:

- Being blamed for something you didn't do.

- Being teased about your accent or your voice.
- When you have intentionally hurt someone's feelings.
- Feeling misunderstood.
- If a friend ever turned on you.
- If you or anyone in your family or a friend has a disability.
- If you have ever stood by and watched while someone was hurt and said or did nothing because you were too afraid or didn't know what to do.

During the variations, please request the audience to be completely silent.

Debrief

1. What was it like to delve into memories?
2. How do you see the other person before and after the conversation? Did you notice any change in the way you "feel" about the other person?
3. How do you feel towards yourself?
4. What would a very kind and non-judgemental friend say if he was here and heard you? (often participants do not see their truth bench chat as a brave act of vulnerability and you might have to point it out)
5. What came up as an observer?

Reflections

I remember how some of us resisted doing the truth bench because it was personal. Some of us were good at making comic scenes out of what others said but which told little about our own journeys. Humour became a shield. Truth bench is a gentle way to chip away some of that shield so that you may notice that you are not that different from others. Plus, it has the advantage of evoking feelings of compassion when people talk about something that hurt and how they felt befuddled and lost. Since truth bench is about "true" stories- it is unique as an activity. Finally, I often find that the truth bench will ground us in safety and can remind us that everyday life is good enough as is and quite extraordinary.

Compassionate Listening (Limited movement, likely neutral)

Rationale

Listening is healing. It is something that we are rarely trained for and can be immensely uplifting to the spirit. This activity helps people listen actively. Also, this activity is sedentary and therefore a good choice when participants do not want to move around much.

Process

1. Form groups of 3. Give each group a question that each person will answer. Participants may choose from:

    (a) What are you struggling with these days?

    (b) What are you doing really well these days?

    (c) What is the one thing that keeps you stuck?

(d) What is the one thing that keeps you going?

(e) What do you judge yourself most for?

(f) What do you praise yourself most for?

2. Each group sits in a circle. After a few moments of breathing, A will begin speaking. He has 4 minutes to answer the question. He can choose to pause. He can choose to close his eyes.(The facilitator keeps time)

3. B will listen and summarize occasionally what she is hearing. B can also use phrases that show active listening like "I hear you" and try to be completely absorbed in the listening. Avoid writing anything down.

4. C will be quiet throughout as A speaks.

5. After A has spoken, B will summarize what she heard. No clarifying questions. A will elaborate, confirm, or modify what B has summarized.

6. C's role is to bring the focus back on listening i.e. if either B or A are speaking over each other. Sometimes A will be polite and agree with what B said even though it might be partial or incorrect. C will notice that and gently point it out.

Remember, no fixing of problems. No solutions. Just complete listening.

Debrief

1. How was listening? Hard, easy, unnerving? Why?

2. How was it being listened to?

3. Where does the urge to correct someone else come from? How can we hold it compassionately?

4. How was it to listen without taking notes? What does that say?

Reflections

Not an easy activity, especially for those who are engrossed only in their perspective. When I did this as a participant in a classroom, I noticed that it is hard to remember all I listened to. But then, listening is a muscle and with repeated practice, it grows Also, participants might find it harder to come up with answers to the positive questions which encourage them to look at their strengths- we are often harsher on ourselves and find it easier to list all our struggles and points of being stuck.

Enactment (Varied movement, low triggering, online-friendly)

Rationale

This activity involves listening to someone's story of struggle and letting yourself respond silently, through your body, to what it evokes in you. Watching an enactment of feelings can be cathartic and create a visceral unspoken sense of connection. The physical embodiment of feelings, without using words, can be wonderfully compassionate reminding a person that their anger, pain, joy and happiness is shared and that they are "seen".

Process

1. Divide people into groups of 5-6: preferably self-selected. For the online version, use breakout rooms or ask all except 5-6 people to stop their camera, mute their mic and be witnesses.

2. Each group (in the online version, it will be the people whose camera is on) will listen to a very short happy or neutral story from one of their members. Something simple and non-triggering.

3. Ask the group member to be very brief and capture their story in 4-5 sentences. For example- "I was walking to the store last Wednesday. I saw a homeless person on the street. He had a dog sitting on his lap. The dog was licking his face. The homeless person looked at me and spontaneously we both smiled at the joy of feeling loved".

4. After the members hear the story, they will take a few seconds to breathe in and then use their bodies to show what it evokes in them. These are all individual images.

5. They cannot use words though making sounds may be allowed (In the online version, silence is preferred). The image they make with their bodies can be static or moving.

6. After about 10 seconds of their images, they will unfreeze and return to the group.

7. Now, the group will listen to a story of some kind of struggle experienced by one of the members. Again, something not too triggering. For example, sharing a heated argument with a spouse/friend may be okay- but a life-changing event (say, watching a public brawl) may not be okay.

8. Again, make the story short- no longer than 5-10 sentences. The tellers can take a few moments to formulate or write the sentences if they want. For example, "It was last year and I was at work. My boss walked over to me and said that unless I doubled my sales in one month, I would be fired. And then, he just turned around and walked out. He said it loudly and everybody around had listened. I felt shaken".

9. Like in the earlier case, the others will use their bodies to show what the story evoked in them.

10. Keep going till everyone has had a story of a struggle to tell.

11. If the group feels okay about it, the teller can share a longer or deeper story about their struggle. This works only if the group members have established significant trust.

Variation

Different players can rotate through different roles. For instance, these roles can embody (a) the person at the beginning of the story (b) the challenge/dilemma/conflict (c) the strengths (d) the future (e) the person at the end of the story. As they get up one by one and move, there is a sense of progression and clarity about what each person is. You can also allow props (say, a cloak or a bed sheet) to add to the enactment.

Debrief

1. How was it listening to someone's story?
2. How did you feel when you noticed others responding to your story?
3. How does your memory of the struggle seem now?
4. How can we balance noticing the truth, letting it in and being calm?
5. If and how does this activity challenge the idea that we are separate?

Reflections

I played this when I was learning Playback Theatre. It was day 3 of our workshop and we had established a reasonable amount of trust amongst ourselves. The activity resonated deeply as a teller and as an enactor. The activity evoked tears for some of us when we felt the person's struggle. The facilitator was around to make sure that we allowed a safe space for the tears to flow and ebb. This, we felt, was best done by being fully there

and sending love from our hearts. Touch was okay when the person who was crying initiated it.

The Walk to Peace (Limited movement, Potentially triggering)

Rationale

This activity encourages both mindfulness and compassion and is about (a) distancing the various critical voices which often try to keep us too safe by punishing/criticizing us and (b) nurturing the voices that acknowledge our human-ness while encouraging us to continue striving.

Process

1. Divide the participants into two groups- say, 1 and 2 (at least 6 people in each group).

2. Give everyone in Group 1 five minutes individually to think of a problem or an issue they are facing which is causing some unpleasantness and is relatively low-stake. Remind that the issue must not feel overwhelming. For example, worry about a recent tiff at home, guilt at speaking harshly to a parent/friend, fear about a mistake at work/school are okay but a scary incident about physical abuse or violence is a no-no. Tell them that they should be able to describe that issue in one sentence or phrase.

3. As Group 1 begins to spend individual time contemplating the issues, divide Group 2 into two teams.

4. Each team in Group 2 plays the voice of the rough critic or the fierce compassion.

5. The Rough critic voice team people are instructed to say things that are mean, insulting, or inconsiderate of emotional pain.

   (a) You are weak

   (b) You don't deserve better

   (c) You are a terrible person for doing that

   (d) Don't be a wimp/too sensitive- get on with solving the problem

   (e) Why are you so sensitive?

6. The Fierce compassion team people are instructed to say things which a nurturing coach or close friend might say (Ask them to imagine saying it to a child who has just fallen down and hurt herself)

   (a) I am so sorry that you are hurting.

   (b) I am here for you.

   (c) I care about you and believe in you

   (d) It is okay to feel like this, take a deep breath.

   (e) This is normal. Others experience the same feelings too. You are not alone.

   (f) Let us lean into wholesome joy. Let us do something that will be healthy for your mind and body right now.

7. Ask 3 people from the Rough critical voice team to stand in a line, shoulder to shoulder and then ask 3 people from the Fierce compassion team to stand and continue the line.

8. Ask one person from Group 1 to come close to the line while others stand back.

9. This person reads out his statement and then takes a step forward so that he can hear the critical voices. He keeps moving slowly till

he hears the compassionate voices. Allow the critical voices and compassionate voices to speak at the same volume level so that the person from team 1 hears most of what the people closest to him are speaking.

10. Reverse roles with Group 2 after everyone in Group 1 has had a chance for the walk through.

Debrief

Please exercise prudence because of potential triggers. Give people time to write or ease out if they feel triggered.

1. How was your experience as a listener? What came up?
2. How was it to be a critic/compassionate voice?
3. How can we strengthen our compassionate voice?
4. What is the critic trying to protect us from?
5. How can we tune it down?

Reflection

Doing this for the first time can be extremely liberating and also scary. I wish we had people ready to give us a hug when we finished the walk because there is so much that is resonating with the voices. When you do it repeatedly, you notice the 'play' in the voices and see how you can dance with them.

In this chapter, we considered activities that could develop and sustain compassion towards the self and the others. As compared to the last activity involving the walk, other activities are relatively easier to do. Compassion is something we are biologically wired to do, but have usually forgotten because of poor nurturing and mistaken beliefs

about being extra special. Compassion acknowledges that we are all like a fingerprint- unique and shared at the same time.

In the next chapter, we will consider activities that foster courage.

Chapter VI

Courage

A few days ago, in a book reading group comprising around ten friends, I said that I was feeling disconnected with the group's focus on choosing books and readings that were pseudo-spiritual. I said that sometimes spirituality can be made into a crutch, an excuse to not work or engage with the difficulties of having healthy materialistic goals. I also said that it would be completely okay if the group wanted to read such books but I will not join them.

After the session, a friend messaged and said that she was feeling the same and she thanked me for having the courage to clarify my needs to the group. I had dismissed my action as ordinary- as "just" expressing my needs. But as I reflected on my action, I remember how I felt uncomfortable challenging the group, how my heartbeat had gone up and how I continued with my request even though no one seemed to get what I was saying. The group members insisted that spiritual books were weightier and more meaningful than love sagas or science fiction- and that I was not seeing their point. As a person who had always tried to accommodate others' requests (Be nice, Be nice) and struggled with expressing what I needed for my nourishment- this has been a long journey. And till my friend pointed it out, I had not considered this act

as a growth- as an act of courage.

Courage cannot be simply told. It is an act that often requires practice. Courage is standing up for what will nourish you and others. Courage is asking for help. Courage is saying No to one more vodka shot even if your colleagues say that you are letting them down. Courage is listening without judgement and without the need to fix someone else. Courage is trusting that you are good enough. Courage is healthy, wholesome and good for you and others.

New Choice (Limited Movement, Likely Neutral, Online-friendly)

Rationale

This activity is chosen from my experience in improv theatre. The activity helps to make people break from their familiar reactions to situations and people- through new and constructive choices. New choice not only encourages creativity, but also provides unique solutions to dilemmas.

Process

1. Two volunteers come to the centre of the circle and they have to play out a 2-minute dialogue.
2. The others give the two actors a simple physical activity (petting a dog, hammering a nail, planting flowers, drinking water) to inform their scene.
3. The volunteers mime the activity for a few seconds and then make up a short scene with dialogues. However, instead of having a complete uninterrupted conversation- after every 2-3 interactions, they will act as if they didn't hear the other which is a cue

for the other to make a different response. An illustration will help.

(a) A: I think it's gonna rain.

(b) B: Sorry, I could not hear you well

(c) A (new choice): I think you are going to have a baby

(d) B: Yes, I puked in the morning today

(e) A: hunh…couldn't hear you

(f) B (new choice): Let's call the baby Little Blue Bell.

(g) A: Whaaaaat

(h) B (new choice): I said I hate having babies during rains.

(i) A: Still didn't get ya

(j) B (new choice): I said the dad is an alien.

(k) A: wow, I love alien babies.

4. After B interrupts A in line b, the new choice by A takes the dialogue in an unplanned direction.

5. The challenging and fun part is that one can keep doing this 3-4 times to evoke different new choices (see lines f, h, and j)- all in response to A's statement in line e.

6. The IMPORTANT thing here is that new choices are responding to the same statement. That means B has to say something that responds to and builds upon A's statement of having a baby. Hence, a response like "The water is cold", "I hate the facilitator" which has nothing to do with A's statement doesn't count as a new choice.

Variation

Instead of new verbal choices, participants have to enact new physical choices. So, they speak the same statement (e.g. I puked in the morning

today) using different and preferably exaggerated body actions every time.

Debrief

1. What was hard about this activity?
2. How did coming up with a new choice shift what happens?
3. How does it feel to play this game?
4. Did it get easier or more difficult as you played the game? What does it say about our reactions to situations?

Reflections

This seemingly simple game can be one of the hardest to play and therefore requires great courage. Often, it also reveals deep-seated and censored thoughts and then the joy of letting them go where they no longer have control over us. I remember how my colleague and I were playing the game of being in a barbershop. He was the barber and as I sat for the haircut, the facilitator pushed us repeatedly for new choices till the barbershop had alien beings running over the floor and we were dancing to avoid trampling them. The audience was in splits and we realized that to trust ourselves takes courage.

3 Clicks (Limited Movement, Likely Neutral)

Rationale

This activity is literally a visual depiction of what courage means and in a unique way of working together that almost forces one to see a different perspective. Partners work in constant silence and interaction

to create an image that showcases their individual voice and perspective. The activity provides space for multiple interpretations of courage. The innovative use of camera and photographer add a mystical energy. This activity is best done when the participants have established a medium to high level of trust and are ready to surrender in small ways to their partner's will to co-create something.

Process

1. Create pairs (Y and Z; let us give A and B a break)

2. Z will be the photographer and Y the camera for the first phase and then they will reverse roles. All this will be done in SILENCE.

3. The word that each pair will capture is "Courage".

4. First, Y will close her eyes and Z will hold her hand to gently guide her to capture three images that represent courage. Give the pair 5 minutes to do so.

5. Say, to begin with Z guides Y to the first object (say, a clock) that he wants her to see. He positions her head so that the closed eyes are directly facing the clock. Then he will gently squeeze her hand as if pressing the shutter of a camera.

6. Y opens her eyes for no more than 3 seconds to take in whatever object is in front of her. She is the camera so she cannot move her head either. Hence, her eyes must be positioned correctly by Z. She closes her eyes after 3 seconds.

7. Then Z guides her to two more objects and clicks their images in the same way.

8. They return and Y takes 3 minutes to note down what she saw and how she makes sense of the images. Nothing is spoken.

9. Roles are reversed and now Z is the camera which is guided by Y- till Z writes down his notes.

Variation

Use texture instead of or along-with images. For instance, Z will put Y's hand on an object (say, a handrail or a door handle) and let her feel the texture.

Debrief

1. How did it feel to be the camera or the photographer? Which took more courage?

2. Ask the people who had been the camera first- What sense did you make of the 3 images shown? (Photographers must NOT disclose why they chose the 3 objects or tell their reasoning)

3. Ask the photographers- How does the camera's response make you think of courage?

4. Repeat Question 2 for the photographers and then ask question 3 to the people who had been the camera first.

Reflections

This activity involves some amount of surrender but is extremely revelatory in how we make sense of the same object with the same trigger word. I remember how my partner and I were shown a door knob and we interpreted completely different meanings to it. Learning cannot be demanded and we must become comfortable with different meanings attributed to the same thing. It takes courage to live with that.

Soundscape (Limited Movement, Likely Neutral)

Rationale

Going beyond words and using sound can invoke courage by taking small risks in a fun away. I find sound to be primal and capable of multiple interpretations- a purring sound can mean more things than saying hello, right? So, in this activity, instead of focusing on the eyes, we will focus on the ears and the voice and see what can be created through sounds. Creating a soundscape is about finding magic in the ordinary every day and knowing that allows us own up your rightful space (and no more) and our voice, even if it feels strange and new. Also, this activity creates a collective soundscape- a truly courageous act!

Process

1. Request people to step into the circle, preferably seated with their backs straight. Explain that we will work with sounds to think, evoke, express and sense different emotions. We will play with vocal chords.

2. Remind people that sometimes laughter might be a block against feeling vulnerable.

3. Wait till there is silence. Maintain eye contact and a smile as you go around the circle once. This helps get people's full attention and builds a ritual-like feeling.

4. Now ask people to close their eyes and imagine the first couple of hours of their everyday morning to create a soundscape. Ask them to imagine the various things one-by-one that they do once they wake up.

5. Now, ask them to begin adding sounds that they hear every morning. For instance, the sound of making coffee or chai, bird sounds, dogs barking, water running it the sink. No words if possible- unless of course they hear a song/prayer every morning coming from a neighbour's house.

6. Keep the soundscape alive for 5-7 minutes. You will have moments of silence too. The aim is to completely feel the space, even if that lasts for a few seconds.

7. Ask participants to slowly open their eyes.

8. Ask participants to move around the room, shake-off their bodies and then sit down at a different position from where they were seated earlier.

9. Now, explain that we will do another collective soundscape with eyes closed, but for a common place.

10. Encourage people to use their physical bodies to create sounds (e.g. slapping the floor, rubbing the cloth, snapping fingers).

11. Ask for a specific place that everyone (including you) knows intimately i.e. has seen, heard about and preferably visited. Select a place that has many sounds (e.g. the animal shelter, the flea market, the cafe, the school during recess, the bar).

12. Begin the soundscape. For example, if the chosen place is a temple or church, then people can begin making sounds of the organ music, the prayer song, the bells, the brief phrases you might hear. Even subtle sounds like someone's feet on the floor can be wonderful.

13. Keep the soundscape alive for 5-7 minutes. You will have moments of silence too. The aim is to completely feel the space, even if that lasts for a few seconds.

14. Ask participants to open their eyes slowly.

Variation

Divide the group into two. During the first soundscape, one group will create the sounds while the other will stand (eyes closed) and move their bodies to the sounds being heard. They will remain fixed to the floor so that they do not bump into each other. During the second soundscape, roles are reversed.

Debrief

1. How did that feel?
2. What sounds really stood out for you?
3. What sensations did you experience?
4. How is this connected to finding your own voice?
5. How did it feel if you chose to let go and flow in the making of a soundscape?
6. How did the sound shift the embodiment?

Reflections

I remember doing this for Haridwar, a temple city. Each of us began to add an element- a priest chanting mantras, the sound of fire during a yagna, the river, the astrologer enticing a potential client and so on. We all had goosebumps. This activity is very powerful in connecting people through the courage of sharing the ordinary or taken-for-granted. Perhaps it brings forth a different way of expression which does not involve talk and that is unique and powerful. What is important here is the sincerity with which the participants approach the activity, so try and introduce it at a time when you feel that the participants are ready (during a time of feeling trusted and more risk-taking as a group). And yes, even remaining in silence as a group is courageous in a world of incessant talk.

Montage (Limited movement, Likely Neutral)

Rationale

This activity focuses on creating a visual group image of the specific theme of your workshop which is rich for analysis. The richness comes from the multiple stories and threads that get triggered and generated around the same theme. There is a debrief which is part of this activity which almost makes it a dynamic process of reflection in creation.

Process

1. Tell participants that we will create an image together based on key words. Not everyone has to participate at this stage because it will take some courage.

2. Think of one non-living thing as an object to be created (e.g. a shoe, a flute, a remote control) preferably an object that you have heard being spoken about in interaction with the group earlier.

3. Now tell the participants that when you speak the word, one person (Macy) will go to the center and will depict the object. No right or wrong depiction. Suppose the object is shoe, Macy will go to the centre and say "I am a shoe".

4. Others join Macy one by one as elements to build a montage around that object (shoe). They are not other depictions of the shoe. For instance, Jay could go and say "I am a shoelace". Bobbie could say, "I am the piece of gum attached to the sole". Cindy could say, "I am the boy who lost his shoe".

5. Encourage that the different people who enter the collage position themselves accordingly- for instance, Bobbie (the gum)

could sit down next to or hug Macy's leg (shoe). Usually, people will do it on their own because it is intuitive.

6. People might find ways to connect with subsequent objects (e.g. the gum) than the shoe- and that is perfectly fine. For instance, Ida could join the collage and say, "I am the wrapper that the gum was in". Betty could say, "I am the other shoe the boy lost".

7. Once people stop joining the group image, the first person/original object (Macy/shoe) will choose one person/element (say, Jay/shoelace) who will stay on while the remaining people/elements unfreeze and return.

8. This time Jay will decide what object to be.

9. Others will join in the same way as earlier- one at a time and becoming a montage (steps 4 – 8 above)

10. After a few montages have been created, pause the activity and say that now the objects must be positive values- e.g. compassion, peace, perseverance, focus, collaboration, courage and so on.

11. This time participants will make montage of the values. For example, if Boomie is the first person and says, I am justice- then Bobbie could join and say, "I am the scales of justice". Jay could say, "I am the convoluted legal system" and Charlie could even position himself far and say, "I am injustice".

12. Do a quick debrief when no one else is joining the group and the participants are frozen.

13. Go to each element and ask as if you are holding a mic, "What are you thinking about?" Participants respond as the element. For example, Bobbie (scales of justice) could say, "I feel like I am always unbalanced". Jay could say, "I am sorry for the trouble I cause" and so on.

14. Conduct an orchestra by going from one voice to another with your imaginary mic. Feel free to go to the same person to repeat their phrases so that they are heard again and again.
15. Unfreeze

Variations

You can divide the group into 2 and only half the people become the montage at one time while the other half witnesses. Another variation could be to encourage dynamic depictions of elements so people can move- making it a fluid montage.

Debrief

1. How was the experience of being the first piece?
2. What came up for you?
3. What prompted you to join the montage? How did it feel?
4. How can we aspire higher?

Reflections

I have done this so many times that a session seems incomplete without this activity. It can even be a 2 minute closure activity if participants are very familiar with what to do. I remember that I was playing with a group and one of the members came up consistently with stories that blew us away. She would take any object and create a story around it. If we began with a kite, she would be the boy who came home to find the kite as a birthday present, if we began with berries, she would be the girl in tattered clothes who sells them on the street. The stories always warmed up the interaction.

In this chapter, we considered the activities that we could use to

inculcate courage. Courage is not always the wonder-woman or superman marching against an evil enemy. Everyday courage is about staying with the unpleasantness of vulnerability and doing what is good for us. In one way, we have come to closure now that we have covered the 3 dimensions. In the next chapter we turn our attention to the closure activities that bring the sessions to a close.

Chapter VII

Closures

We had just finished an intense debrief and there was a nervous, anxious energy in the room; unspoken words and feelings hanging in the air. There were 3 minutes left before the session ended. I requested everyone to get into a circle and close their eyes. Then, I asked them to clasp hands with their neighbours- their left hands with palm facing-up and the right hand with palm facing-down. I told them that we are now like an electrical wire, passing energy. If they find their hand squeezed, they let the current enter their body and then send it along by squeezing the next participant's hand. I began the wave by squeezing the hand of the person to my right...soon I found my left hand squeezed- the current had passed full circle. Then, surprisingly, my right hand got squeezed too. Someone else had initiated their own current wave. Soon, hands were squeezed intermittently as multiple currents were passed. There was also muted laughter. Within 2 minutes all the unspoken energy had dissipated. People were ready to head back to their life outside the session.

These are activities that allow people to re-compose before they return to their daily lives while healthily integrating what occurs during the session. When working with equity, people could remember some painful incidents and it is important to close the session in a way

that those events are healthily processed or held till the next session. For some, the closure is also a summary of what was done. Closure activities both energize and hold.

The Magic Box (Inspired by my ex-colleague B. Greene-Vanhorn)

Everyone stands in a circle. Silently, everyone thinks of two experiences that stood out to them from today's sessions. Have everyone pull those two experiences from the air where their memories are. Participants should hold their experiences between their palms. There is a big imaginary box in the middle of the circle in which everyone will put their two experiences. They hold their palms up to their lips, take a deep breath, and blow their experiences into the box. Then, everyone takes another deep breath and blows on the box really hard to push in the sides of the box. They do this three or four times. Once their breaths have squeezed the box (imagine!), everyone rubs their palms together, and they use the magic in their fingers to make the box levitate. Everyone lends a hand and then with one heave smash the box against the ceiling. The box breaks into a million tiny pieces that float down silently – like snowflakes. Let everyone close their eyes and soak in the experience. Just stand in a corner and smile or quietly exit the room. This is a tribute to the participants. As a variation, instead of experiences, ask participants to think of two values (e.g. honesty, vulnerability, kindness) that came up for them in today's session- values, they want to uphold in their future actions.

Buzz

Everyone stands in a circle- holding hands. They make a buzzing sound, similar to that of a bee. Their left palm is facing up and their right palm is facing down -as if they are receiving this energy from the person on the left, letting it pass through them, charging them up and then sharing it

with the person on the right through their right hand. While they do so, you talk about what was done during the session and thank everyone for participating fully in the session. Give encouragement and stress the team spirit (the participants, they fully need this!!). Say that at the count of 3, they will release their powerful energy by freeing their hands, throwing their arms up and saying ZAP. Count to 3 and "ZAP". The introduction to this chapter offers a variation of this activity.

Check Out

This is the same quick activity as in the Warm Ups to highlight bodily how everyone is feeling. Get the group in a circle and give the following instruction: "I want you to show how you are feeling right now. You can use your body or any sounds – but no words". It could be useful that when you do this the first time, you volunteer to be the first one to show how you are feeling. Be honest and don't think too much. Once you have shown your movement and/or sound, encourage the person on your left or right to go next and then go around the circle. There is no evaluation- encourage laughter.

Once-there-was

This activity is especially useful if the group is large or some people might want to witness, rather than do some active tasks. Ask the more active volunteers or half the group to get into a semi-circle. The space in front of the semi-circles becomes an imaginary stage and the remaining people, who are not part of the semi-circle, face this stage to witness the action. The person who is on the extreme left of the semi-circle comes to the front-centre of the stage, facing the witnesses, and says "Once there was a …"- completing the blank with something very brief that he/she finds memorable from the day's session. For example, if there was a story in the session about someone who felt angry- then this person might say "Once there was an angry person" or "Once there was anger." After saying that, the person walks back to join the

semi-circle at the centre. Then the person, who is on the extreme right, walks to the front-centre of the stage and says "Once there was…."- again completing the blank with something he/she found memorable. Then he/she joins the semi-circle at the centre. The activity goes on till everyone has had a chance to say "Once there was…" It is important to make it quick- so that there is only a 2-3 second gap between each "once there was".

Here are three closure activities that, besides in-person interactions, work well for online sessions.

Take Away

Quickly create an order of which participant will speak after whom. You may also use the same order as was created in the "favourite insect" warm-up activity described earlier. Or, you can simply go by alphabetical order of names on the screen. Participants only need to remember whose turn they follow. Now, each one will name one take-away from today's session. This take away can be a phrase, a sentence or a value. No more than 6-10 words. They can also "pass".

Progressive Calm

Find a piece of music that you find soothing. Tell participants that you will play the music and give directions. Begin with asking them to lie down or sit comfortably. They can turn off their video if they want. Ask them to first tighten and then relax the muscles of their feet. Then work your way up- ankles, calves, thigh, reproductive organs, stomach, lungs, fingers, elbows, shoulders, neck, mouth, ears, nose, eyes and crown. Each in-breath tightens and each out-breath relaxes. If you still have time, go down the body in the same order to end with the feet.

Gifts

Participants give and create gifts. To illustrate, one of the participants, say Megha begins the gift giving by saying to another participant "Hey Ojas, you are looking bright today, so I got this for you". Megha mimes handing over the gift box and Ojas mimes collecting it. Ojas now uses his imagination to "creates the gift, looks at it and say-"Oh! What a lovely blue shirt to make me look brighter...THANK YOU Megha". Now Ojas gifts another participant by using the same script-"Hey Rohit, you were so sharp today and I got this for you.." miming the gift box. Rohit takes the cue from "sharp" and says for example-"Ah, a book by Einstein..I will read this to get sharper. THANK YOU Ojas. And so on..till everyone gets a gift. Make sure that the Megha is the final person to get a gift so as to complete the circle.

In this chapter, we considered closure activities that bring sessions to a coherent end. These activities help participants return to their lives outside the session- feeling more composed and collected. I find them useful not only for the participants, but also for me.

In the next chapter, I share my final reflections about using theatre activities to develop core qualities.

Chapter VIII

Epilogue

Theatre is life changing- both for the facilitator and the participant. The physical sensations provide an opportunity for change that is not possible by our educational and societal system's preoccupation with sit-and-learn paradigms. Movement creates its own knowledge, its own epistemic landscape much like the knowledge of riding a bicycle cannot be simply written and imbibed. This means that unless you take this book/manual and apply it in your classroom or community, this knowledge will remain inert. More than applying the knowledge to others, I encourage you to dance with them.

My biggest successes I believe have occurred when I played with the participants i.e., I allowed myself to be sculpted, I was willing to be seen as a vulnerable and playful human. It is not easy and I don't think it will ever be. But it gets better and once you allow yourself to play with your participants and join their sculptures, you will notice a change within you and that is the best way for connection, compassion and courage to become embodied.

Although this book gives you various exercises, I would encourage you to adapt them after trying them out. Think of them as a starting point that needs to be tweaked to your participant needs. I know that this might be disappointing for the readers who want a fail-safe formula.

On the other hand, there is freedom and agency in adapting these activities. This does not mean that you adapt them before trying them. I provide these instructions after failing a few times and noticing what works. So, try the activities once, see what comes up and then adapt them till you feel in your belly that they are working.

Finally, although I value participant feedback after a session, I do not let that solely decide what I will do next. Theatre may be uncomfortable for some because it will challenge their models of the world. Hence, some annoyance at the way activities are designed or how they unfolded will happen. So, take a judgement call. Sleep over it and see if you feel that the activities need to be made softer, more collaborative, more probing, or whatever the feedback seems to suggest to you. Your voice matters as much as those of the participants. If you do not feel that your needs are being met, they will not feel it either.

Wishing you the best.

Chapter IX

Additional Resources

This is a list of books and online resources that you might like to read and adapt

Books

1. Theatre of the Oppressed by Augusto Boal. A theoretical introduction to the practice. Provides the historical underpinnings of different kinds of theatre.

2. Rainbow of desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy by Augusto Boal – looks at internalized oppression (Cop in the Head). A wonderful read on individual liberation.

3. Games for actors and non-actors by Augusto Boal – a storehouse of games and activities. A great companion to this book/manual.

4. Improvising real life by Jo Salas. It is a personal story of the author in playback theatre. Very engaging and full of insights about conducting theatre.

5. Impro- Improvisation and the Theatre by Keith Johnstone. I love the author's reflection on education and what it takes to be an excellent teacher. Another great companion to this book/manual.

6. An Actor Prepares by Constantin Stanislavsky – the book is a "mock diary" of an actor describing a series of exercises and rehearsals in which he participates. He details his own emotional and intellectual reactions to each effort, and how his superficial tricks and mannerisms begin to disappear as he increasingly gives over his conscious ego to a faith in the creative power of his subconscious. Wonderfully easy to read and apply.

7. Free Play by Stephen Nachmanovitch – A book on creativity like none other. Very inspirational. I recommend it to come up with adaptations of theatre games.

8. Zen of Groups by Dale Hunter, Anne Bailey, and Bill Taylor – Helps you understand group dynamics and also showcase various techniques to understand and monitor group energy, this is it. Also read The Art of Facilitation by the same authors.

9. Theatre for Living: The Art and Science of Community-Based Dialogue by David Diamond. Great resource if you are working with communities.

Articles

1. From Freire to Boal by Hernan Flores – a meeting with Boal where he explains the Freirian philosophy as inspiration for TO.

2. Democratic Process and the Theatre of the Oppressed by Marie-Claire Picher - describes the methodology of the Theatre of the Oppressed with examples.

3. Theatre for Learning by Bertolt Brech and Edith Anderson – Explains epic theatre and didactic theatre.

4. The Cop in the Head: Three Hypotheses by Augusto Boal and Susana Epstein

5. Interactive Theatre and Self-Efficacy by Suzanne Burgoyne, Peggy Placier, Mallory Thomas, Sharon Welch, Clyde Ruffin, Lisa Y. Flores, Elif Celebi, Noor Azizan-Gardner, and Marilyn Miller - advantages and drawbacks of using interactive theatre for faculty development on multicultural issues.

6. Invisible theatre, ethics, and the adult educator by Bonnie Borstow – Answers questions like : What are invisible theatre's claims to ethicality? How valid are the claims? Are the claims and practices compatible with adult education principles? And how might invis- ible theatre be conducted more ethically?

7. Living Newspaper Theatre and Therapy by John W. Casson - historical development of Living Newspapers and the therapeutic value of this technique.

Websites

http://www.janasanskriti.org/ and http://www.ccdc.in/ TO in India
http://brechtforum.org/ -Workshops and more
http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.org –international TO organization
http://www.toplab.org/ -A laboratory on TO
https://improvasateachingtool.weebly.com/- A useful resource for using improvisation games in the classroom